



General Introduction to Karl Marx's Capital, Volumes 2 and 3

The second and third volumes of Karl Marx's Capital will be serialised here during the fourth quarter of 2016.

We have first to consider how we will do it. These works appear difficult, and long. We are trying to make a way to move through them without stalling.

This will not be done by examining every detail, but it will be done in such a way as we can gain a broad idea of the scope and direction of Marx's intentions.

Division

Fortunately, Marx's division of Volume 2 into three Parts, and Volume 3 into seven Parts, will allow a convenient arrangement of the two volumes together into a "Generic

Course” of ten parts, like the other fifteen courses of the Communist University.

Each Part of the two books is further divided into several Chapters. We will not attempt to tackle each chapter, or to amalgamate chapters. Instead, as a rule, a suitable chapter will be chosen from each part to serve as basis for discussion, while the Introduction will attempt to relate the chosen chapter to the entire Part.

Thus, while we will not have completed an exhaustive reading of the two works, yet we will have a much better idea of their scope, their shape, and their trajectory, and with luck, a good understanding of some of their highlights, or “salient points”.

Those will be deemed suitable chapters for discussion which are short enough, and written in prose rather than relying on formulae. Otherwise, the content of the chapters will dictate the choice.

The Puzzle of Volumes 2 & 3

The major question that arises with Volumes 2 and 3 of “Capital” is whether, as Engels wrote in his Preface to Volume 3, they contain “*the most important parts of the entire work*”, or whether Volume 1 remains the essential answer to the quest for “the secret of the self-increase of capital” - surplus value. Marx’s words, also from the beginning of Volume 3, provide a clue:

“The various forms of capital, as evolved in this book, thus approach step by step the form which they assume on the surface of society, in the action of different capitals upon one another, in competition, and in the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves.”

It is becoming a fashion to quote from Volume 3 in particular, sometimes in a manner that implies that a good knowledge of Volume 1 is not enough any more, or can be “trumped” by those with knowledge of Volume 3.

But if it is understood that Marx’s purpose was to challenge “economics”, and not to confirm it, and thereby to go beneath “the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production” to the real relations that exist, then Volume 1 must remain the ruling and determinant volume out of the three main volumes (Volume Four is Marx’s summarised reading notes, called “Theories of Surplus Value”).

Indispensable

Nevertheless, Engels’ remarks have some meaning, especially today, in the context of the “Global Economic Meltdown” of 2008, and the on-going “World Economic Crisis”.

Because it is in Volume 3 that we arrive at Marx’s very clear understanding of the way that capital plays out in the dominant public realm, and consequently in the power politics of the day. This is what makes Volume 3 in particular such a valuable and indeed indispensable book for today.

To consult a different study guide, mainly composed of questions but with some fruitful links, you may go to the [MIA Study Guide for Capital Volume Two](#), and the [MIA Study Guide for Capital Volume Three](#).

Amandla!

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